

*Libya*

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FROM: HAL SAUNDERS

TO: TONY LAKE FOR HENRY A. KISSINGER

The report of the coup in Libya will be clearer in another 24-48 hours. Following is to give you the best Washington appraisal as of the end of the day (Monday).

A group of young military officers has staged a coup, proclaimed the "Arab Republic of Libya" and set up a Revolutionary Command Council. The head of that council is the only individual publicly named so far as associated with the coup. He is a 34-year-old former officer who has apparently been brought out of "retirement," Colonel Sa'ad al-Din Abu-Shuawayrib. He received his basic military education in the UAR Cadet College but has since attended US military schools, including Command and General Staff Officer Course in 1964-65. His bio in intelligence files describes him as pro-US, but of course no one should lean too heavily on that description in present circumstances.

The best we can say about the political complexion of the new government ~~in the circumstances~~ without knowing more about its composition is that its very few initial pronouncements show some moderation. For instance, representatives of the coup group have assured our charge that the coup was directed at the removal of internal corruption--of which there has been an increasing amount recently--and not at any foreign group, east or west. The new government has promised to protect foreign interests, including oil companies. The five-point statement proclaiming the new government said the regime would be socialist, would seek solidarity ~~of~~ with the third world and would be based on the Koran.

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By current Arab standards, this is a mild statement, especially since it omits the vigorous statements on pursuing the struggle for Palestine that one would expect of any more radical group.

During the day, we have watched for signs of counter-action by forces ~~existing~~ seeking to rally behind the monarchy. None so far as we can tell have materialized. The King himself, 80, is in Turkey. The Crown Prince apparently went on the air, renounced his prerogatives as viceroy and urged support of the Revolutionary Command Council. Elements of the police and military which we thought might have resisted have one by one been reported as supporting the coup. The major element not heard from is a large group of civilian politicians who owed their bread and butter to the monarchy. We ~~may~~ may learn more of how the politicians have split when the composition of any new cabinet becomes apparent, but in any case resistance now would seem to depend on support from within the army, ~~which~~ and possibilities for that have narrowed.

Since Americans do not seem to be in danger, the ~~main~~ contingencies we have to think about involve Wheelus Base. The Royal Libyan Air Force is based there and depends entirely on US logistical support. If there were any counter-coup, we would have to consider how to react to and Air Force request for support. We might also have to handle requests for asylum at the base. And Eventually, the chronic pressures for us to give up the base may reassert themselves. None of these seems to be upon us tonight, so I ~~will~~ will not take up your time discussing them. In short, we want to keep Wheelus insulated from this to the maximum extent possible.